



The Dialogue Has Started

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, May 21, 2007

My first post on San Jose Inside spoke about the lack of maintenance the San Jose parks were receiving, particularly the historic Municipal Rose Garden Park.

As I mentioned then, I met with city staff and residents to do an initial walkthrough of the park and I saw firsthand the disarray of the park. Shortly thereafter, I submitted a memo asking the council to consider a "pilot program" for outsourcing maintenance at the park. My pilot proposal was heard on May 15 during the evening meeting.

I came to the meeting prepared for a couple of things. First, I knew my pilot proposal would not pass, even though I and many residents of San Jose felt it was the right thing to do. Second, that labor would be against any proposal that contains the word "outsourcing." On the dais, I spoke about the need for the city to save money and deliver efficient and effective neighborhood services, and the fact that my proposal was just that—a one year pilot that would be measured.

During this process, there were a few individual people against my proposal under the veil of "Rose Garden neighbors." They put out a press release which I obtained via email as a Microsoft Word document. When I went to the "properties" section of the press release document, I found that the "neighbors" group was not the author. Instead, I saw the name Bob Brownstein as the author and the software had been licensed to Working Partnerships USA (Union). Bob Brownstein works for Phaedra Ellis-Lampkins, the head of the South Bay Labor Council.

I made my comments and asked the council to send my proposal to "meet and confer." The meet-and-confer process can take as long as a year! It involves sitting down and negotiating with the labor unions. Unfortunately, none of the city council members supported me. However, Mayor Reed was supportive of the pilot program and also warned the council that our city budget is in such a severe deficit that we need to be innovative.

I was taken aback when speakers from labor that spoke before the council that evening said that I didn't follow "the process." I thought to myself: I didn't? How is that?

Throughout my campaign of seven months, I spoke of the need to investigate outsourcing some park maintenance. The city currently outsources some street paving and saves money and receives good service. I thought we should do the same with park maintenance. Once elected, I wrote a memo which went to the Rules Committee. I wanted my idea to be placed on the city council agenda as soon as possible for open discussion.

Simultaneously, I held a press conference with Rose Garden residents present. Over 30 residents were in attendance and very supportive of my idea. The neighbors also organized a neighborhood meeting for me to share my proposal with over 40 residents at the Hoover Community Center.

On May 15, I shared my proposal and then I heard the cliché "I didn't follow the process." I believe that I followed the process and from the feedback that I received from residents throughout San Jose, they believe that I did.

The "process" was that they thought this issue should have gone to committees first and that I should have called the unions before coming to the city council. I respectfully disagree.

I feel that every city councilmember should be able to bring forward ideas to their team—in this case the team is the city council—so that ideas can be expressed in the open and not behind closed doors. I don't believe that I have to contact the Chamber of Commerce or the Labor Council before I bring an idea to the city council.

The city council is the elected body charged by the residents of San Jose to create and implement policy. Commissions, committees and various groups are not directly elected by the people. I have no problem if the city council chooses to send an issue to a committee for review. Having a smaller group review and make recommendations to the city council is a good idea. However, I strongly believe that in order for government to be open and honest, all issues, ideas, etc., need to be brought to the city council for open dialogue. The city council meetings are televised so that every single person with a TV can watch them. Calling special interest groups or sending an idea to a committee whose members are appointed—not elected—before bringing the idea to the city council is not what residents want. They want you to solve problems as soon as possible.

My pilot proposal is now going to the private/public committee, and then it will be brought back to the city council in June. Fair enough. I am looking forward to what the committee's thoughts are and I deeply appreciate my fellow team members (city council) for supporting this.

Today, May 17, my office again received numerous calls from the Rose Garden area—but this time with good news. Seven trucks from the parks maintenance department were spotted this morning taking care of the park—proving that the idea of outsourcing works.

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